

Nielsen hopes to realize cross country potential

By **RANDY SHARER**
Pantagraph staff

MAHOMET — The people who most admire the running talent of Mahomet-Seymour High School's Dan Nielsen hate to say just how good they think he can be.

They fear bold predictions will inadvertently place pressure on the 5-foot-8, 125-pound junior's shoulders.

"I don't want to put any pressure on Dan, but I don't see any reason he shouldn't win the state title," said Bulldog senior Brian Easter. "I've never told him that."

Physically, Nielsen has the tools to run with the best Class A runners, according to Mahomet-Seymour coach John King.

Nielsen's weakness is the inordinate amount of respect he pays other top runners.

"If he ever loses this total respect thing he has for some other people, his potential would be unlimited," King said. "I don't question his physical ability at all."

One of the runners Easter thinks Nielsen respects too much is Jeremy Skinner of Shelbyville.

Skinner, seventh in last year's state meet, is the only runner to have beaten Nielsen this season.

The main state title contender the Corn Belt Conference champion hasn't faced yet is Herscher's John Eggenberger, who placed third in last year's state meet and is the top returner.

The two meet for the first time this season at Friday's 4 p.m. Paxton Sectional.

They haven't met sooner because Eggenberger missed two-thirds of the season for disciplinary reasons.

They would have met at Amboy's Columbus Day Invitational (which Eggenberger won) except Nielsen, a baritone, was at a choral event winning all-state honors.

Eggenberger and Nielsen last



Dan
Nielsen

Area runners eye sectionals

Pantagraph area high school cross country teams will try to qualify for the Nov. 4 state meet when they run in sectional competition Friday and Saturday.

The top five teams advance along with the top seven individuals not on qualifying teams.

Eight area teams will compete in the Mahomet-Seymour Class A Girls Sectional Saturday at 9:30 a.m. See Scoreboard for a listing of entrants.

Delavan and Illini Central will be represented by two girls each at the Kewanee Class A Sectional Saturday at Midland Country Club at 11 a.m.

For Class AA girls, six area teams and three individuals will compete at two sites Saturday.

For Class A boys, 12 area teams and five individuals will compete at two sites Friday. For Class AA boys, six area teams and five individuals will compete at two sites Saturday.

The state meet at Peoria's Detweiller Park will have the Class A boys race at 9:30 a.m., the Class A girls at 10:30 a.m., the AA girls at 11:30 a.m. and the AA boys at 12:45 p.m.

raced each other in an indoor track meet last spring. Nielsen defeated Eggenberger for the only time in his career in a mile run.

"He's a really good competitor," Nielsen said of Eggenberger. "He goes out fast and tries to maintain the pace as long as he can."

King believes Nielsen's best strategy is to stay close to Eggenberger Friday and beat him on the final sprint.

"I've never been in a situation to outspurt him," Nielsen said. "I guess we'll see if I get a chance

to."

Nielsen isn't looking at Friday's meet as a two-runner race.

"I think there's a danger in looking at it that way," he said. "There are definitely other guys that can challenge."

King said Nielsen is successful because he's willing to go for broke.

"He's willing to push himself to the absolute limit," said King, who ranks Nielsen as the best junior he's had in 19 years as coach.

Nielsen placed 22nd in last year's state meet and 82nd as a freshman.

Before he lays claim to the title of best King-coached cross country runner, he'll have to better the time of 14 minutes, 41 seconds which Mark Johnson ran on the 3-mile state meet course when he placed 13th in the 1974 single-class meet.

King labels Nielsen a quiet introvert. He's also honest and dependable, according to Easter.

"If he says he'll be somewhere, he'll be there," Easter said. "A lot of people find him unusual because he's sort of quiet, but when you really get to know him he's fun to be around."

Besides running and singing, Nielsen can also play the piano and alto saxophone. He's gotten straight A's throughout high school except for a B-plus in Algebra II his freshman year. He took the ACT test as a sophomore and scored 27.

"I don't think you'd ever find anybody who would say anything negative about Danny," King said. "The other kids like him and respect him."

Nielsen's success has helped the Bulldogs gain a No. 8 state ranking. Also in the team's top seven are Burt Huddleston, Hans Waters, Easter, Derrick Short, Nezar Kassem and David Wagner.

Nielsen's willingness to accept coaching advice is a factor King believes has helped separate him from other runners.

Now if he'll only accept King's claim he should be confident.

"I told him," King said, "If your confidence isn't up now after all you've done, what will it take?"